

frightful torture and death, as had happened to Lt. Hans several weeks earlier.

This was 28 November 1952. For more than two months they had succeeded in staying behind the Viets and, for one month with the complicity of the inhabitants, they had been able to give the Command useful intelligence on the units marching toward Na San. From now on they would undergo the fate of all prisoners taken by the Viets and, despite two aborted attempts at escape, they remained in the camps until the end of July.

On 16 October, the day before the fall of Nghia Lo, Sergeants Bourdon and Baudouin from the Than Uyen Hundred left with their partisans to complete the destruction of the bridges on the highway from Lao Kay to Chapa and to mine the highway. They did not have a radio. At this time it had not yet been possible to give one to all of the Hundreds.

They carried out their mission in a normal way. On the return trip on 22 October the inhabitants of the village of Ma Lou Tcha informed them that the Than Uyen post had been evacuated by airplane, but that no one knew in which direction.

The day after the post evacuation, I flew over the region where I expected to find them. In spite of my insistence the pilot would not go below 1,500 meters in this territory, which he did not know. At this altitude it was impossible to spot a few men moving on small paths in a mountainous and wooded region, or to see the signals which they could have made to me. My intention was to send them a weighted message to inform them of the situation and possibly to guide them. On the fourth day I had to abandon my search.

Thus Bourdon and Baudouin were left to shift for themselves.

They first freed their partisans and buried their weapons, and then marched in the direction of the Red River. On the way some partisans helped them, while others remained indifferent. A number of times they had to cross zones where there was a heavy Viet density, to quiet sentries, or to infiltrate through rest camps of Viet units at night without being spotted.

Finally on 6 November they reached the edge of the Red River.

They made a raft with bananatree trunks and put it into the water while it was very cold, as often happens in the High Region in this season: they began a long and painful voyage.

On the nights of 10 and 11 November, they were at Yen Bay and passed unnoticed in the middle of the boats and rafts which were transporting troops, supplies and wounded men from Viet units across the River.

Finally on 13 November, exhausted and half-dead from hunger, they rejoined the French troops which had launched the "Lorraine" operation and who were about to return.

General Salan immediately awarded both the Military Medal.

The fall of Nghia Lo was a sad surprise for the Command, and the victorious Viet divisions swarmed toward the west. During this critical period, General Salan several times flew over the region to observe the new battlefield. Sometimes he took me with him, along with officers of his General Staff.

One day--I no longer recall the exact date--we were coming back toward Hanoi from Lai Chau and were flying over the Black River. There seemed to be no obstacle to oppose the triumphant attack of the Viet divisions.

In the airplane the officers who accompanied the General were quiet. All were wondering how we could get out of a situation which appeared desperate. The General had an olympic calm; no trace of worry appeared on his face. He was thinking. "Maybe we could try to establish a front on the Black River," suggested an officer.

The General, unperturbed, did not reply. We all left the aircraft without being able to know his thoughts and the decisions which he would take in the following hours.

The next morning he had a stroke of genius for Na San.

At 8:00 a.m. he summoned his General Staff and the officers involved. He explained his plan soberly, but with a warm conviction, a brilliant clarity--indisputable signs by which a leader is recognized--and restored confidence to everyone who had had temporary doubts.

None of the officers who listened to him had heard of Na San before. It was not even a village, but a path lost in the brush on which the Dakotas could land. But General Salan did not need to hunch over a map to find it. He knew this country because he had often gone over it on foot, and sometimes surveyed some of it. Before the 1939 war we and Salan had surveyed 400 kilometers of paths with a rule and had made maps of the frontier region between the Chi Ma post, which I commanded at that time, and the Dinh Lap post.

The order was given to all of the troops, retreating or simply threatened, and to all of the isolated posts to get to Na San as fast as possible. Each one began to work enthusiastically under the orders of a real leader, Col. Cilles. In a few days the trenches were dug and support points, shelters, and barbed wire networks rose from the soil.

When the Viet divisions rushed to attack on 30 November, the defense had been thoroughly organized. For three days, until 2 December, all of the attempts to take the entrenched camp were vain. Ciap finally ceased his attacks, leaving only a few units around the camp to assure its surveillance. And 700 corpses on the ground.

Colibri and Cardamome

The year 1952 had not been brilliant for the GCMA. All hope had been lost with the defeat of the Cho Quang Lo underground in August and the occupation of the Thai country in November.

However, we had made some interesting experiments. They had cost us dearly; lessons had to be drawn from them. In particular we had become convinced that all of the mountaineers were savagely hostile to their country being occupied by the Viets, and that they were only waiting for our help to free themselves. So everything was not lost. We had to begin again on a new basis.

We had kept two firm support points which we could use as bases for departure: Na San, which had triumphantly resisted the assault of the Viet Divisions, and Lai Chau, which had not been attacked.

The GCMA was again going to undertake the conquest of the mountaineers from these two bases.

The mission of setting up an underground in the Longhe and Cotonh plateaus had then entrusted to Captain Hebert, a volunteer for this mission who had outstanding service records in both Indochina and France. At the end of December he went to Na San with Colonel Gilles to inform him of the mission he had received. Gilles listened to him with a sceptical attitude; anything which was not traditional warfare left him indifferent. Nevertheless he allowed Hebert to take quarters inside the entrenched camp.

The captain had received the following instructions.

"Inside the triangle formed by Dien Bien Phu, Thuan Chau and Son La there is a Meo population which must be contacted and developed as rapidly as possible, if we are to prevent them being ruined by these Viets, who want to find a refuge for their squads and their guerrilla groups in these regions which are difficult to reach.

"As soon as he is quartered and as a matter of primary importance, the Contact Chief will do his best to direct his activity toward the Longhe plateau in order to coordinate his efforts with the contact currently being instructed in the Ia Drang region and recently ordered to work in the same direction on the plateau situated east of Dien Bien Phu."

Before going to Na San, Hebert had become acquainted with all of the documents existing about the region at the Documentation Office of the Tonkin Regional Representation. He had also visited the catholic mission in Hanoi, where he had obtained a map made by Father Schmidt, and where he had met an old missionary who knew the Meos of the region perfectly. At the beginning of January he set himself up at Na San with the European non-commissioned officers, Senior Sergeant "Le", the Chiao Pen Cam (village chief) of Thuan Chau, various Thais of his company and a powerful ANGRC 9 radio.

After having learned of the mission given to Captain Hebert, the Commander of the Na San Resistance Center did not hide from him the fact that it seemed impossible because of the current situation. This observation coming from a particularly dynamic and optimistic leader reflected very well the impression of the command at that time on the set of underground problems.

However, six months later, Hebert and his small initial team had established a solid footing throughout the Longhe plateau, and they were about to allow the evacuation of Na San without losses.

Certainly the underground fighters were recruited under difficult conditions. Actually the Resistance Center was surrounded by the Viets at that time, the squads of which controlled the region. In addition the morale of the population was not very high.

In spite of great difficulties, the Contact Leader succeeded in establishing contact with the local chiefs. Beginning in January, the Co Noi (Northwest Operational Group) launched reconnaissance missions in all directions. In this way Co Noi and Chieng Dong in the east and Mai Son in the south were reoccupied.

Toward the end of January Hebert and Chatel took advantage of a sortie made by the BP 3 from Chieng Dong, in the direction of the former of Ban Huoi Chuoc on RP 17.

They had about 20 partisans with them, including 2 Meos originally from the region south of Yen Chau, a plateau parallelling RP 41, where Lao Ke, a well-known chief was supposed to be. Actually it was Lao Ke who had saved Captain Latapie and had brought him back to the French lines after the fall of Nghia Lo. Hebert had requested a Cross of War for the Meo, and it had been granted to him.

During the night Lao Ke rejoined Hebert at Chieng Dong and left him a dozen Meos willing to follow him. Then he went back to his fief. From February 1953 on Hebert had 80 partisans, including 20 Meos and a dozen Thos. They were trained on the spot, during patrols made by the Resistance Center.

On the other hand, training of radio operators and team leaders took place at the Hanoi Central Office, which rapidly grouped together about 50 units.

At the end of February Hebert participated in an operation directed by Major Bigeard against Son La, which made it possible for him to establish contact with Thuan Chau and to recruit new partisans. Two months later he captured Thuan Chau by himself.

Two new non-commissioned officers were assigned to him: Schneider and Maljean, which allowed him to begin new patrols toward the west. Schneider reached Blanche 15 miles southwest of Son La after 6 hours of marching, and brought back 15 new partisans.

Having enough manpower, good command and good means of radio communication from then on, Hebert decided to scout along the Song Ma, an important river which ran parallel to the Black River. The villages of Ban Le, Muong Lam (where there was former territory of Morane), Ban Da Ni, Ma Lang and Ban Phung, all dependent on the village chief of Thuan Chau, were situated in this valley bordering the south of the Longhe plateau, his objective. Finally his final objective, Pa Lao, was above Muong Lam in the very center of the Longhe plateau.

Senior Sergeant Chatel was in charge of this mission. He had about 30 Thais and about 20 Meos from Longhe, including the chief of the village of Pa Lao, Lo A-Leu (who had come to join our plateaus with his ancient partisan rifle, a 07-15 in perfect condition), an ANGRC 9 radio set and a 300 set.

On 7 June 1953 Chatel reached Song Ma. While crossing a river the batteries of his C 9 got wet and contact was interrupted. Hebert was able to take off from Na San in a Dakota piloted by Major Fourcault and reestablish contact with Chatel. Batteries were parachuted to him and contact was reestablished.

The preceding night Chatel had intercepted about 50 coolies, led by 2 Viet Cong and transporting a ton and a half of rice. The two troops had been killed and their weapons recovered. The coolies, recruited in the villages south of Song Ma, whom the village chief knew, were all volunteers for the underground.

Chatel requested weapons and ammunition to be parachuted to him, and this arrived the next day. He now had more than a hundred men available. Ambushes were set up on all of the paths north of Song Ma. In 2 days 4 rebels were killed and 2 Viet Cong taken prisoner. In this way he learned that the rice collected in the Song Ma valley was carried through the mountain paths on Son La to feed the Viet Cong besieging Na San.

On 17 June Chatel departed on the Song Ma path and reached Muong Lam on 20 June. On 22 June, following intelligence provided by Hebert, the GOMC launched a reconnaissance patrol toward Son La, and then toward Ban Tham, on RP 41. Accompanied by Sergeant Maljean, Hebert participated in this reconnaissance with about 20 partisans, a CS and a 300 set. Then, leaving the regular troops who returned to Na San, Hebert and his escort took the path for Muong Lam; notified of this, Chatel went to meet them with about 20 partisans.

Hebert and Chatel were at Muong Lam during the evening. Since the village was on the west bank of the river, about 20 canoes carried them across. The entire village was there to welcome them. The Morane strip was immediately put back into condition, and a footbridge built for walking across the river. Lo A-Leu, the Meo chief of Cotonh, came down from his mountains to mix contact with them. There were no more Viets in the region. Those who had been captured had left their ears there. It was a male tradition to cut off the ears of their enemies, and even to eat their liver. Hebert had quite a bit of difficulty in putting an end to this custom.

On 27 June with his Meos and about 20 Thais, Hebert left in the direction of Pa Lao and Cotonh on a Meo path. There were 6 hours of march. 3/4 of the men remained at Muong Lam with Maljean. Lo A-Leu had promised 200 partisans at Pa Leu and at Cotonh. They really were there, with about 20 armed with prewar partisan rifles, muskets and 07-45's, maintained like treasures. But their ammunition had been used up long before.

Two messengers were sent in the direction of Thuan Chau on Meo paths passing through Ben Cat and Co Pia on 30 June. On 5 July the messengers returned from Thuan Chau with about 30 Thais who volunteered to be armed. Many others were also waiting for weapons. Everyday new Meos arrived with intelligence.

On RP 41 and at Thuan Chau there were several Viet passes in both directions, equal to a platoon. From time to time political commissioners came to bring a good word. Therefore it was possible to set up headquarters at Thuan Chau as soon as the volunteers had received the weapons they were waiting for. Hebert requested 4 FM (expansion unknown) and 300 rifles for them, and these were parachuted down.

There was complete success. All of the people contacted rallied and asked for weapons to expel the detested Viets.

Therefore it was a matter of organizing this large crowd.

Hebert was brought back to Na San by a Morane, that picked him up the afternoon of 9 July at Muong Lam to organize his underground fighters and to proceed with the necessary parachuting. He was reinforced by Sergeant Ansidei and 25 Thais, who had received commando training at Hanoi and were intended to lead the partisans, plus radiomen trained in the instruction center. He organized his underground fighters in the following way: the Aiglon underground in the southwest, the Calamar in the center, and the Colibri in the northeast.

Sergeant Schneider, who had remained at Na San, was brought by a Morane to Muong Lam and received the order to go to Pa Lao and Cotonh in order to take command of the Calamar underground, taking over from Chatel. Sergeant Maljean had remained at Muong Lam with the Aiglon underground. Chatel, who had been at the head of the undertaking and had succeeded remarkably, was invited to take up headquarters at Thuan Chau with the village chief; thus the latter could go back to his fief. Recently arrived at Na San, Sergeant Ansidei was sent on 17 July to join Maljean at Muong Lam in the Aiglon underground, the manpower of which increased constantly.

Major Fournier, who had closely followed the evolution of the underground, and who had instructed the staff and radiomen, was ready to meet all requests.

On 1 July parachute drops were made: 15 PM and 100 rifles to Muong Lam (Aiglon), 1 FM and 50 rifles to Pa Lac (Calamar), and 2 FM and 150 rifles to Thuan Chau (Colibri). On 19 July Hebert settled in Morane on the land reconditioned by Chatel 8 kilometers from Thuan Chau. All of the people helped him and requested weapons. It was the same for Calamar and Aiglon.

On 20 July Hebert parachuted 100 weapons, including several PM, to Chatel (Colibri) at Thuan Chau, as well as provisions, for the people needed them. At nightfall on 22 July 300 weapons were parachuted to Sergeant Schneider at Pa Lao (Calamar). On 28 July 200 weapons were parachuted to Chatel at Muong Lam (Aiglon).

From then on weapons, ammunition and food were regularly dropped by parachute at the request of the underground leaders.

On 30 July Hebert dropped 10 commando parachutists to Muong Lam and 10 to Thuan Chau to complete his officer staff.

At the end of July and the beginning of August the completely organized assembly of the underground took place. All of the Viet troops in the region had been suppressed by the inhabitants; the local forces had been destroyed or surrendered. On this date the assembly was comprised of about 3,500 armed and organized men.

On a number of occasions Hebert and Fournier had demanded to be given the elements of a battalion to retrain them for working with the underground. The stubbornness of General Gilles in preserving the 8th BCCP did not permit this experiment to be conducted, one which would have been very profitable in the future.

I had asked Major Fournier, who had replaced me at Hanoi during February, to closely follow the installation of these undergrounds, so that it could serve as a model for setting up new undergrounds. Anticipating this evolution, I had initially given him the armament, materiel and the radio sets necessary for him to be able to meet the requests of staffs in the field punctually. I had also preserved a maneuvering stock sufficient to provide rice and basic food, if necessary.

The aviators were thrilled by this mission, especially the Dakota pilots who, in all kinds of weather, had parachuted the requested materiel at the appointed points. I must particularly mention Nicolas, the pilot of the Morane Beaver, who had always met Hebert's requests in setting him down on difficult terrain and in hedge-hopping over zones to be explored, and the Civilian Beaver pilot, Lantel, who landed in the underground everytime I asked him to and who knew the High Region perfectly. This experiment would make it possible for us to develope a doctrine which, rigorously applied, would produce considerable results in a short time.

This was when the opium question came up for the Meos. There were about 3 tons of opium at Pa Lao and Cotonh. In peacetime the Meos processed the precious merchandise in the valley and sold it to Chinese merchants. This traffic had become impossible. The opium had been confiscated by the Viets, who used it as a means of exchange with China to buy military weapons. Now, the Meos were completely unprovided for, and they had exhausted their stores of food.

Hebert proposed to Major Fournier to evacuate the opium by means of a beaver and to put it at the service of the Customs and French authorities, who would pay for it. But Fournier knew about the unfortunate opium affair¹ which had taken place in the south, and stubbornly refused, unless he received specific instructions on this subject. Agreement was given by Saigon too late.

At the same time that the Colibri, Calamar and Aiglon underground fighters were being set up from Na San under the direction of Captain Hebert, another experiment was being tried from Lai Chau. It differed essentially from the former because it was going to be conducted from one stage to another by the natives alone.

We had finally obtained permission from the Command for the frontier zone extending from Red River to the east to cease being a zone forbidden to the GCMA;

¹ See "The Opium Affair" pg. 99.

this zone ran about 50 kilometers to the west and about 50 kilometers deep. At the beginning of 1953 the Command agreed for an underground to be installed in this region. Lieutenant Nung, a Meo from the Phalong region serving as a Frenchman was designated the leader of this underground. He received the following mission: "In Phong Tho region which the Viets occupied in October 1950, and the Than Uyen region which the Viets occupied during the autumn 1952 campaign:

"1) To contact and regroup sympathetic inhabitants by first concentrating our action on the Yao Sam Meo and the Cloud Pass where the people are most favorable to us;

2) To organize this region into an underground and undertake guerrilla activity to force the Viets to evacuate Phong Tho, Binh Lu and Chapa; and

3) To take up quarters in Phong Tho and Binh Lu, and then, from these spaces, to study the extension of these undergrounds in the direction of Than Uyen and Nghia Lo."

Nung was an officer of rare value. In May 1952 he had been designated to organize and direct the underground fighters of Upper Red River; they developed like a brush fire with an alarming rapidity under the instigation of 2 local high-class chiefs, Cho Quang Lo whom we have already seen operate, and Hoang Tseo Lung. But they had practically no staff and particularly no means of transmission. Therefore they had to be found and trained. To exploit this situation to the greatest degree and to extend our fighters in training over a vast zone, they had to be organized.

After having obtained agreement from Cho Quang Lo, who had known him for a long time, Nung was designated to direct this group of underground fighters. For this purpose from May to August he attended CIF training, plus aerial support training and paratrooper training. Now we know that the intervention of a Chinese division, the 302nd, from 18 June 1952 on, had finally destroyed the underground organization of Cho Quang Lo. However, intelligence confirmed to us that many

underground fighters in this region had remained loyal to us. Hung was to collect these men, start the underground again and expand it.

Hung selected and trained a team of 40 men who were to become his staff; 4 nurses were also trained. As an aide he received a native mountain officer, Lieutenant Lung, recovered from a Vietnamese battalion. Lung, originally from Luc An Chau, received the mission of training the underground elements and planting them on the left bank of the Red River in the Luc An Chau district. This meant extending the Chocolat underground of Cho Quang Lo much further to the south.

In September 1952 the 2 teams were parachuted with their leader into the Nghia Lo region to complete their training there. They were heavily involved in the October combats. But, although they were believed to have disappeared, they were recovered almost completely at Na San the next month. These were elements which circumstances forced us to remove from their initial mission on the left bank of the Red River, and which constituted the base of the Cardemone underground.

The men for the special parachute missions were assembled at Hanoi at GCMA Instruction Center to be instructed and trained by Lieutenant Hung. The elements intended to act on the ground were assembled at the Lai Chau Instruction Center, trained and instructed by Lieutenant Lung under the direction of Lieutenant Boile du Chaumont, commanding the Lai Chau antenna.

While ground commando instructions were going on at Lai Chau, the Hanoi Center parachuted Special Missions into the sectors of Chapa (6) and then Von-Than Uyen (10) on 15 February 1953, at Lou Tring Thong (12) on 21 March and Phong The-Muong Ham (11) on 2 May. The intelligence collected and the morale of these people proved to be excellent. Establishment of the underground could be undertaken.

The operation began on 24 May. It was conducted from Lai Chau by the Longho Commando, 150 men strong. On 30 May this commando reached Then. The 29 Thot partisans of this village, owned by the Viets, came to our side. From 3 to 10 June the teams carried out the anticipated infiltrations. On 14 June 200 new partisans came to our side with their weapons.

All of these elements, commandos and new joiners, about 400 weapons strong, and encircled the Phong Tho coast. In order to prevent any useless ~~ennemis~~, the post was bombarded on Long's request by 3 B-26's. It surrendered on 17 June.

Conversions to our side were numerous until the end of June. On 30 June there were about 600 underground fighters with 165 weapons furnished by the GCMA and 300 weapons brought by those joining us.

As soon as it was established, the Cardamone underground began its activities. With rare skills, taking advantage of all favorable occasions, it conducted deep contact and guerrilla activities in every direction. All of the Viet troops were liquidated. The Viets occupying the region, seeing them appear everywhere, overestimated their capabilities. Unable to engage them, they finally retreated and left control of the territory to the underground fighters. Like Colibri, Cardamone thus became a firm departure base for future operations.

Profiting from the experience of the previous year, we had established underground with the maximum care and methods. Colibri and Cardamone constituted a testbench for developing a reliable method of planting underground fighters in the High Region of Tonkin and Laos. The Cardamone underground was particularly interesting, because it was composed solely of natives. From now on the GCMA took this route whenever it was possible, i.e, when it found native staffs of value. All of the underground fighters of Tonkin and Laos were established by applying this same method. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, the vicissitudes of their installation were not to be

detailed in this work. I apologized to the officers and non-commissioned officers who worked there. They had the same properties and the same value as those of the 2 underground organizations I have just described.

This entire series of operations had been conducted on the ground by the natives alone, with remarkably well-trained and reasonably instructed teams. They produced a considerable morale effect on the mountain people, who always admired a well-armed and disciplined unit. These people were flattered to find that they could have valuable leaders, capable of leading them, in their midst. Here is an extract from one of the first reports from an underground commander.

"In the beginning the inhabitants ran away when our partisans appeared. But they noted that the latter spoke their language, that they did not take up quarters in their houses, and did not ask them for anything, but on the contrary took care of the sick, came to help the poor and aided them in every way, especially with respect to food.

"From then on they came to our side."

"Stopped at Na San, the 1952 autumn offensive (the fall of Nghiia Lo) had shown that Laos was threatened and that its protection had to be assured. General Salan decided that the GCMA should plant some underground fighters in Upper Laos, where the people were particularly favorable to us.

On 17 and 18 November the Moc Chau post, 80 km south of Na San, was overrun by a powerful Viet attack, although it was backed up by a battalion of the 1st RTM (Moroccan Sharpshooters Regiment). Most of the officers of the Moroccan battalion were carried as disappeared.

On 28 November Dien Bien Phu, held by a company of Senegalese sharpshooters, was occupied by the Viet Minh.

General Salan asked Lieutenant-Colonel Grill, the CGMA commander, to study the possibility of installing undergrounds in the entire mountainous zone of North Laos. All of the Laotian people there were favorable to us, including the Meos who occupied the upper peaks. For this mission Grill designated Captain Desfarges, who had been an aide in the North Vietnam Regional Representation, assisted by a very good officer, Lieutenant Brichier. Nine non-commissioned officers were put at their disposition, as well as 10 Vietnamese radiomen trained in the Cape Saint-Jacques Instruction Center. All were paratroopers. These men formed the "Malo-Servan group".

The Laotian authorities, especially the king of Laos and the prince Savang, who would be the heir, as well as Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, received this mission favorably and promised us all possible aid. On the other hand, Touby Ly Fong, the king of the Meos, was contacted directly by General Salan, who had known him for a long time. Touby agreed to give us his support. Political and religious leader at one and the same time, he exercised uncontested authority over all the Meos. Therefore this was a valuable trump.

The Malo-Servan mission was established. Thanks to Touby, 1,000 Meos were rapidly armed under the direction of Brichier (who was to be killed in Algeria) and 2 non-commissioned officers appropriated from the TAPI. Thanks to the good will of Colonel de Bollardiere, they rapidly became quartered in the north of Sam Neua and formed the Servan underground.

Intelligence received from Sam Neua was alarming. They reported 2 Viet battalions taking positions to occupy the city. With no possibility of reinforcing these garrisons and preferring to concentrate their forces to oppose the Viet attack in preparation under good conditions, General Salan decided to move the Sam Neua garrison to the Plaine des Jarres. An entrenched camp, analogous in its design to that of Na San, was set up there; it included the best elements of the Laotian forces.

On 5 April Colonel Maleplatte, commanding the Sam Neua sector, was summoned to Hanoi by General Salan, who informed him of his intention to totally evacuate the troops from this sector.

The Servan underground, established for only a few weeks by Brehier and his Meos, received the order to assemble as fast as possible at the path which led from Sam Neua to the Plaine des Jarres and which the Maleplatte column would use during its retreat, or at least to post there several elements which could serve as collection elements and guides. The order to retreat was given to Maleplatte on 12 April 1953.

After having destroyed everything possible, the column set out at midnight in the direction of the Plaine des Jarres. The last elements left Sam Neua toward 6 a.m. on the 13th.

On the morning of the 14th, after having passed the village of Muong Ham during the night, the column was violently attacked. However, progress continued. New attacks were made on the 16th. This time the column literally burst.

Most of the men of the Tactian 8th rifle battalion came from Sam Neua. They were unhappy to ever retreat. If they deserted, it was because the Plaine des Jarres in their eyes was a distant and unknown region, because they were reluctant to abandon their families in this way.

The Meo fighters of Brehier perfectly played the role assigned to them. They collected, sheltered and guided a large number of isolated and small friendly groups to the Plaine des Jarres. Colonel Maleplatte himself was recovered, as well as half of the Europeans and a third of the Laotians, without counting the large majority of the riflemen of the 8th battalion who later rejoined the underground, when Brehier was able to contact them. Before it was possible to recover him, Colonel Maleplatte, whose presence had been reported by radio, remained more than a month in the Meo underground. Finally a helicopter was able to carry him off and take him to the Plaine des Jarres.

Captain Desfarges, reaching the end of his tour, was replaced by Captain Marson, a man from Lorraine of an extraordinary stamp. Under a fierce and severe appearance, he was politically clever. Based at Vientiane, he rapidly made contact with the civil authorities. He maintained excellent relations with the President of the Lactian Council, Prince Souvanna Phouma, who received him without formality at every request to give him maximum help. Relations with Colonel de Crevoceur, who commanded the troops in Laos, were likewise excellent.

Laos was a small kingdom of a family character. Mr. Qui Nam, for example, a friend of Captain Marson and vice-president of the National Assembly, received Marson and me in his shop, and we discussed the current problems, all 3 of us sitting on bags of rice.

Vientiane had nothing in common with Saigon, where relations were always difficult and complicated among the various civilian and military authorities. At Vientiane, particularly thanks to Captain Marson, everything was simple and the environment was perfect.

Laos was not a kingdom united under the authority of its king. Actually the king was only the King of Luang Pratang. His authority did not extend beyond one province. Touby and his Meos, savage warriors who were always feared by the peaceful Laotians in the valleys, reigned on the Tra Ning plateaus. In the south there was Prince Boum Cun de Champassac, very much pro-French. In 1945 he had agreed to place himself under the authority of the king of Laos, on condition of being part of the Lactian government in which, at various times and according to the current situation, he occupied important posts.

Finally, north of Cambodia, there lived in each of the valleys, often closed and very isolated, half savage peoples who had never yet had any contact with Europeans.

A Hundred was installed at Attapeu with Captain Jestus and several non-commissioned officers to contact them and to forestall the Viets in these practically unknown zones, and thus to prevent them from being ruined.

Captain Marson received the mission of reestablishing contact with all the peoples northwest of Laos, particularly with the former Muong Sin posts (dear to General Salan, and commanded by him as a lieutenant and a captain for many years), and the post of Ban Houei Sai on the Mekong River.

Captain Mourier took over responsibility for this mission. Everywhere the people and the local leaders gave him an excellent welcome, not understanding why we had abandoned them. Our former partisans were the first to rejoin us, often with their old weapons (muskets of the 1914-1918 war), which they had carefully preserved. The purpose was to put these people in a state of defense and prevent the region from being ruined by the troops sent by the Viets.

For reasons of logistic facility, the Phong Saly region was attached to the RR-NV (North Vietnam Regional Representation). The Tra Ning plateau and the underground organization were entrusted to Cpn.de Bazin. Rarely has an officer undertaken such a difficult mission with so much heart. In perfect accord with with Touby, he had all of the males of the Tra Ning region contacted, and they replied to his appeal.

Departure from North Vietnam

Lieutenant-Colonel Grall, had extended his tour one year after having commanded the 5th ECCP. He was to return to France at the beginning of May 1953.

As soon as I arrived he proposed that I take over the GCMA command on his departure. He would perform his normal tour in France. By then I would have finished my tour in Indochina, and he would return to replace me.

"And then," he had said to me, "The war is not going to finish next week. You will come again to relieve me."

We had worked hand in hand in a broad spirit of camaraderie, sharing the concept of the role which the GCMA should play in Indochina. Therefore we had an excellent formula.

However, it was with regret that I gave up the Command of the Regional Representation of North Vietnam. I had worked with a team of extraordinary value. The activities which we had undertaken had thrilled us all.

I also knew that at Saigon I would become involved in administrative complications and be in direct contact with SDECE at Paris, of which I knew nothing. However, I was well acquainted with the Colonel Delegate of the SDECE General Director in Indochina. During my tour at Lai Thieu with the 2nd ECCP, I had maintained excellent relations with him and his friends. When traffic was open between Lai Thieu and Saigon and we were at rest, he often came to visit us. But I knew him on the human level, and knew nothing of his mission and his role in Indochina.

I was going to be replaced in Hanoi by Major Fournier. He was one of the young men in my class. I had known him for years. Before the war he commanded the Phalang Post. He knew the Meos and had been in Indochina throughout the war. After the takeover of the Japanese on 9 March 1945, he became part of General Alessandri's column. Thus he had succeeded in escaping the Japanese and got to China. He was one

of my good friends. Therefore he was very qualified to replace me, and he was available. At the end of February, I yielded the command of the Regional Representation of North Vietnam to him.

By waiting for his departure, Grall proposed that I go to Korea to make contact with the American Special Services. We had very close bonds with them. They were furnishing us with armament and with the radio sets necessary to equip our underground fighters. They permanently appointed one officer to the GCMA EM (general staff), at this time the Major Beglow. Beglow carried out the necessary formalities. At the end of February I left for Tokyo in the company of Beglow and Lieutenant Dabiezies of the GCMA EM.

I knew that the head of the American Special Services for Japan and Korea was Admiral Marshal. I had known him in Peking before the war. He was the captain of a ship and the naval attache. He played as a back in our polo team. Therefore I was very welcome.

As soon as I arrived in Korea I flew over the front in a helicopter from the Yellow Sea to the Sea of Japan, at the range limit of DCA. A very tight network of trenches extended beneath my eyes, more than ten kilometers deep.

Opposite, on the American side, there was only a single line of trenches, but there was also a great network of roads perpendicular to the front, which could have permitted rapid evacuation.

The contrast between the two defensive organizations was impressive. I understood why the American advance had stopped and the front stabilized for a period of months.

I spent one day with the French Korea Battalion installed in shelters like those of the 1914-1918 war. Then I was taken to the Division Command Post and then to the Army Corps Command Post.

During the night a support point, Tea Bone, had been crushed by Chinese artillery and taken before daybreak. Throughout the day I attended the implementation of the counterattack arrangement. A large number of tanks were going to take part. Complete control of the air made it possible to establish everything very calmly at the departure base. Tea Bone was retaken without difficulty.

The Americans had perfectly organized my stay, even my spare time. But the dollars which they had given me on leaving Tokyo were not valid in Korea. Thus it was impossible for me to leave the military area. Certainly I have seen the war, which was not without interest, but nothing of the American Special Services in Korea.

As I knew Admiral Marshal well enough to express myself frankly, I said to him, "Either you have none or you haven't showed me any."

He smiled but did not reply.

Personally I do not believe that they had anything important to show me.

From the time of my return I no longer saw the Major Beglow. He had shown himself to be too pro-French, particularly during this trip. He was replaced by two young American officers of French origin with very French names. But they spoke our language poorly. They were of a mediocre class and tried, through ridiculous procedures, to spy on us. I had to order my officers not to respond to their questions concerning the service, with only I and Captain Duvivier of my General Staff having this authority.

Before Grall departed, he analyzed the situation. The experience which we had acquired allowed us to confirm that all of the mountaineers were favorable to us. It was necessary to make contact with them, organize them and arm them. So it was only a question of method, time and means.

However, we also knew that the underground fighters would never be soldiers as valuable as those in a regular troop, because we never had the capability of giving them the necessary background nor sufficient instructions. We only asked them to hold their region and prevent it from falling under the influence of the Viets, once it was liberated.

These regions were to become ideal zones for regular troops, after adaptation, could move about in complete security, and they could serve as a departure and return base for important destructive raids against the Viet rear.

In agreement with Colonel Bollardiere, Grall obtained permission from General Salan for a parachute battalion to be withdrawn from TAPI to follow a three-month training period at the Cape Saint-Jacques Instruction Center to prepare it for this mission. The paratroopers were to learn to work with small teams among the underground fighters, and to rationally use explosives to destroy defenses and material, which even the best troops did not generally know how to do.

This battalion was to be spirithead of the GCMA. It would have permitted a tenfold increase in the combat value of our underground fighters. We expected a great deal from it.

The 3th BCP of Major Le Borgne,¹ one of our best paratroop battalion chiefs, was the one designated.

¹ Today General of the Army Corps.

Second Part: The Extension, 1953

The Opium Affair

It was clear to General Salan, Colonel Grall and me, to say nothing of Captain Hebert and Major Fournier, that, if we wanted to get all of the Meos, those of Laos and those of the High Region of Tonkin, on our side, it would be necessary to allow them to sell opium, the only means of exchange which they could circulate outside of their mountains.

We knew from a reliable source that the Meo opium was used by the ^{Viets} every year to pay China for the armament of their division. From this viewpoint alone, buying the opium of the Meos meant taking from the Viet Minh a practical means of payment to the Chinese.

Certainly Touby had given General Salan his agreement to bring all of the Meos of Laos to our side. But to be sure of them, it was obviously necessary to allow them to sell this opium which was their only wealth. At the point we had reached, the opium question was an urgent problem to be resolved. Three solutions were envisaged:

--To buy it and then destroy it, by throwing it into the sea, for example. This was the idea solution. Unfortunately it was too burdensome to be accepted;

--To buy it and refine it into pharmaceutical products on the spot and send them to France. This was certainly an excellent solution. It was rejected because France was buying the opium it used elsewhere; and

--Thus there was only one solution left: to transport the opium and leave it its habitual destination: "direct" consumption. The GCMA provided only the means of transportation. The transaction would be made by the head of the Meos who then distributed the money received among the various producers. This is the idea which was adopted after many hesitations.